

Community centrality and social science research

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Community centrality is a growing requirement of social science. The field's research practices are increasingly expected to conform to prescribed relationships with the people studied. Expectations about community centrality influence scholarly activities. These expectations can pressure social scientists to adhere to models of community involvement that are immediate and that include community-based co-investigators, advisory boards, and liaisons. In this context, disregarding community centrality can be interpreted as failure. This paper considers evolving norms about the centrality of community in social science. It problematises community inclusion and discusses concerns about the impact of community centrality on incremental theory development, academic integrity, freedom of speech, and the value of liberal versus communitarian knowledge. Through the application of a constructivist approach, this paper argues that social science in which community is omitted or on the periphery is not failed science, because not all social science requires a community base to make a genuine and valuable contribution. The utility of community centrality is not necessarily universal across all social science pursuits. The practices of knowing within social science disciplines may be difficult to transfer to a community. These practices of knowing require degrees of specialisation and interest that not all communities may want or have.

Keywords: social science; community; engagement; failure; public anthropology; public sociology

Introduction

This paper began as an invited contribution to a panel at the Second International Association for the Social Sciences and Humanities in HIV (ASSHH) Conference in Paris, France, in July 2013. The panel was titled *The Museum of 'Failed' Research: HIV and AIDS Research and the Analysis of Failure*, and was organised by Patricia Kingori and Salla Sariola of the Ethox Centre, University of Oxford.

In this paper, I problematise the role of community in social and behavioural science research and present an argument about the harms of framing social science conducted outside of a community-engaged framework as science that has somehow failed. My argument is not that there is no role for community in research, or that there is no need to democratise forms of research activities we engage in within university and other academic settings (Sclove 1995). Rather, I argue for the value of social research that does not centralise community, and suggest that social research that is not public or engaged (Scheper–Hughes 2009; Burraway 2005), that is neither activist nor community-partnered, is not failed research.

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I have long been a proponent of community-engaged approaches to research as shown in my written work in the 1990s, and my applied research activities. The involvement of community has been a central feature of my academic practice. However, new norms relating to community involvement increasingly obstruct my work and the work of my university-based colleagues. These norms challenge this work through the ways they influence institutional review board practices, through their impact on the funding and governance of research by research-funding bodies, and through their effect on the social science research milieu generally.

In this paper, I problematise the very community centrality much of my own research has built upon. By doing so, I approach social science research that is not community-based or participatory as an activity all-too-readily labelled as *failed* research. I do this to highlight how research that does not require or benefit from a community base, or research in which community is not central, can be interpreted as less valuable and less successful. To accomplish this, I refrain from the more populist rendering of community within research as a 'greater good,' and instead assume a different perspective to explore the knowing exclusion of community from research processes and the forces that may prevent such exclusion. These forces can be social or political and are exercised through the call for an increasingly central and public role for community in research.

This paper is not anti-community. Indeed, I have sought not to argue a pro or anti-community position. Instead, my intent is to begin with the questions of how and why 'community' became such an entrenched ideal in social science, and to explore some of the assumptions about the value and place of community centrality within social research processes.

Community omission as failure

This paper applies recent discourse concerning liberal individualism, neo-communitarianism, public anthropology, and sociology to the social sciences. It applies a constructivist approach to suggest that the centralising of community within social sciences is problematic because it has instilled a fear of the omission of community from the social sciences.

'Community' has been described as one of the most vaguely defined concepts in all of sociology (Day 2006). MacQueen et al. (2001: 1929) provide a reasonable definition of community as 'a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings.' Such a definition would embody many of the disparate definitional threads identified by Kelly and Caputo (2011), from Tönnies' (2001, 1887) early work on *Gemeinschaft* through the health promotion-inspired definition of the World Health Organization (WHO), which in 1986 defined community as:

A specific group of people, often living in a defined geographical area, who share a common culture, values and norms, are arranged in a social structure according to relationships which the community has developed over a period of time. Members of a community gain their personal and social identity by sharing common beliefs, values and norms which have been developed by the community in the past and may be modified in the future. They exhibit some awareness of their identity as a group, and share common needs and a commitment to meeting them. (Nutbeam 1998, 353–354)

In 1998 the WHO refined the definition to suggest:

In many societies, particularly those in developed countries, individuals do not belong to a single, distinct community, but rather maintain membership of a range of communities based on variables such as geography, occupation, social and leisure interests. (Nutbeam 1998, 354)

Today, a comprehensive definition of community would also account for the role of changing technologies like communication and transportation and their influences on the fluidity of communities (Turner and Dolch 1996) as well as the symbolic nature of community. Defilippis (2004 referenced in Kelly and Caputo 2011) has suggested that, beyond a range of 'spatialisations,' the concept of community has become a place of moral and emotional relationships able to influence the construction of identities. As Fettes (1998, 263–264) proposes:

Community consists, in essence, of such connections between expressed thought and lived experience: a dynamic cyclical relationship between the stories people tell about themselves and the ways they relate to one another and to their environment ... the material for building community is ever present, wherever people are and whatever they are doing.

For Kelly and Caputo (2011), the way we define community influences who can be considered a member of that community and can impact representation and legitimacy, particularly with regards to how state actors recognise communities and their influence (Kumar 2005). In mapping theories of liberal individualism, neo-communitarianism, and constructivism onto this community body, I argue that the exclusion of community within research can be detrimental to research practice, if and when such exclusion becomes interpreted as failure. Disentangling the notion of community exclusion can be used to explore the price of inclusion and the costs that practices of engagement may have for incremental theory development, academic integrity, freedom of speech, and the value of liberal versus communitarian knowledge.

Constructivism refers to the idea that truth is a relative and contingent concept. That is, one person's truth may be relative to that person's experience and possibly 'ontologically indistinguishable' from the truths of others that may lend themselves to be proven false. Importantly, 'the fundamental ambiguities of truth as we know it do not negate radically different interpretations of exactly the same evidence' (Downer 2011, 738–739).

In this paper I apply concepts around engagement and involvement rather interchangeably but recognise that there is compelling literature discussing the subtleties of community's roles within a variety of consultative and participatory processes (Hammel et al. 2008; Arnstein 1969). This paper uses social science research in Canada to explore these ideas. Specifically, it looks at research that has addressed HIV and AIDS, as well as the role of community involvement within that research.

This paper adapts elements from the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Australian Research Council (ARC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to define 'social science research' as: an assembly of research practices that enhances our understanding of social, cultural, technological, environmental, economic and wellness issues, tells us about the world beyond our immediate experience, helps us explain how societies work, and assists us to deliver policy and programs that advance social science and humanities research and innovation globally, and that benefit the community.

The centralising of community

In a June 2013 paper published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, Kippax, Stephenson, Parker, and Aggleton describe a common context: non-governmental organisations' central positioning of communities in intervention and other forms of programming. In this case the NGO is the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS):

When affected communities help to plan and implement HIV initiatives, the demand for better and more equitable services increases, awareness of societal barriers and harmful gender norms is raised, governments are held accountable for meeting the needs of citizens and services and outcomes improve. This leads to broader social transformation, which is paramount to halt and reverse the HIV epidemic. (UNAIDS 2012, 58)

The authors write:

Although community has always played a part in HIV prevention, this explicit UNAIDS attention is welcome because it shifts attention away from an earlier almost exclusive focus on risk behaviours and vulnerable populations. It places socially related individuals that make up these communities center stage and in a manner that highlights agency, and more importantly, as we demonstrate, collective agency.

The authors then cite Phil Wilson, quoted within the UN report, and his statement that

Nothing has ever happened in HIV that was not driven by the communities most impacted. (Kippax et al. 2013, 61)

This emphasis on the centrality of communities to the HIV response is almost as old as the prevention of the virus itself. Indeed, 25 years ago Jonathan Mann (1947–1998) was quoted as saying, also to the United Nations:

To the extent that we exclude AIDS infected persons from society, we *endanger* society, while to the extent that we maintain AIDS infected persons within society, we protect society. (Mann 1988 quoted in Brandt 2013, 2151–2152)

Mann, Wilson, Kippax and scores of others have pointed to the centrality of the infected and the affected in the HIV response and the centrality of community to the broader field of social sciences. In this paper I do not question this centrality as response. Instead, I seek to focus on the role of such centrality as a component, partner, and actor within that science.

This paper is not necessarily about the place of community relative to that which happens in the social sciences, but rather the way that community's centrality – political and otherwise – can lead to the omission of a community role in social science research to be interpreted as a type of failure.

HIV's civil society

The contributions of the community-based AIDS movement in addressing the AIDS pandemic have been significant and in many ways have extended the breadth and boundaries of its activities. Following Cohen and Arato (1994, ix), civil society is defined here as

A sphere of social interaction between economy and state composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization. It is institutionalized and generalized through laws and especially subjective rights, that stabilize social differentiation.

To those who study the social aspects of HIV, and who do so in tandem with various manifestations of civil society, HIV has redrawn how we think about and work with this sector. It has changed who is included in civil society, what those included are permitted to do, what their rights are, what their participation is, and the nature of social scientists' relationships to them.

In the example of HIV and Canada, civil society was practically synonymous with AIDS work from the beginning (Catungal 2013; Robertson 2005; Silversides 2003). The earliest cases of HIV in Canada were centred in some of society's most marginal populations, including gay, bisexual and other men who had sex with men, and injecting drug users. This was at a time when discussions of gay rights or the rights of people who use drugs were just beginning. With little recognition by the status quo of the need for the improved social standing of these populations, and with the beginnings of a communicable pandemic about which little was known, fear mongering, stigma, and discrimination were evident and on the rise. The scientific knowledge required to prevent the transmission of the virus was just emerging and no adequate treatment was yet available. In the absence of a coordinated, rights-based response, community members took centre stage in the development and the roll out of services to those infected and affected by this newly recognised incurable virus.

In Canada, and elsewhere, in the early 1980s, the tragedy of this lethal viral entity, for which no effective treatment was available, acted as a poignant focus for civil society. Communities seeking better outcomes for those most impacted by HIV built upon earlier collective and social justice movements in Canada (Allman, Myers, and Cockerill 1997). HIV not only instigated a shifting social landscape vis-à-vis human rights and equity for the marginal and at-risk, but also – because of the way the virus seemed to target those on the margins – it acted to give voice to the voiceless: *Nothing about us without us* (*Nihil de nobis, sine nobis*). That voice, once found, met with a most enabling context.

In countries such as France, England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, movements towards a new social inclusion (Allman 2013) linked with changing patterns of immigration and developments in the public sphere, increased the worth and power of civil society. It was a form of manufacturing. Civil society was engineered (or re-engineered) to regenerate communities and to fight disempowerment related to social exclusion.

Rather than exist outside of the state and its policies, community as civil society embarked on a journey and process that reshaped the boundaries between it as civil society and the individuals and institutions that made up the state (Rose 1996). Out of this emerged new manifestations of civil society that were empowered and included. As Hodgson (2004) described it, many of these groups could look very much like earlier forms of civil society, save for the fact that they were now combinations of state governmental bureaucracy and voluntary organisations that came to epitomise the third sector as described by Etzioni (1973). These forms of manufactured, newly manifested civil society developed new linkages with research and its connections with policy and practice. The evolving relationship between social science and the third sector was driven on one hand by the complexities of the virus as experienced within social worlds – its

transmission and prevention – and on the other by the new relationships the third sector had with the bureaucracies that supported them.

Community centrality in Canada

In the context of Canada, community centrality was established well before the early years of the HIV pandemic. I have argued elsewhere (Allman, Myers, and Cockerill 1997), the seeds of contemporary community movements in Canada were planted in the middle of the nineteenth century when collective labour organisations began to appear in larger population centres, often with ties to railway construction that sought to link cities and regions. With industrial expansion came the arrival of two British craft unions: the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (Taylor and Dow 1988). Following the onset of the First World War, industrial growth, labour shortages, and changes to the real value of wages further prompted collective action in the form of community unionism, which was viewed as an effective strategy for organising workers in geographically isolated sectors of the economy (Tufts 1998).

Subsequently, with the arrival of HIV and AIDS, researchers, governmental officials, and public health professionals joined forces with community interests in the form of AIDS service organisations and activists in an effort to ignite political action and to increase efforts to fund research and related activities. Community involvement in HIV research evolved at the national and local levels to include the appointment of community representatives to policy advisory bodies that were instrumental in establishing research funding priorities (Murray 2004).

Historically, HIV appeared at a juncture when community power was an increasing factor in social life. Influenced by minority rights movements in Canada, (Mitchell and MacLeod 2014; Palmater 2014; Abele and Graham 2011; Cooke and McWhirter 2011; Norris and Clatworthy 2011; Smith 2005) in some regards, community's centrality within HIV research was both required and inevitable, particularly within the sphere of the social sciences. In the early days of the epidemic, on an individual basis, community members may not have been adequately trained to equitably engage within the basic and clinical sciences beyond the realm of treatment activism (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence 2004; Silversides 2003; Rayside and Lindquist 1992a, 1992b). However, their knowledge and lived experience was invaluable for those seeking to better understand the social and structural factors associated with HIV infection and transmission.

In time, community centrality in HIV research became encapsulated under the rubric of Community-Based Research (CBR) (Allman, Myers, and Cockerill 1997). Although initially largely researcher-led in terms of actual research activity, the emphasis on CBR became a recognisable feature among the practices and processes launched by federal and regional governments in Canada, and one that garnered a degree of international interest (Poland 2007).

Presently, Canada's national support for HIV research includes the HIV/AIDS CBR Program. The program has both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal emphases, and aims to further knowledge development and capacity building relevant to stakeholders addressing HIV and AIDS. The definition of CBR employed by the current Canadian federal government suggests:

Community-based research (CBR) is a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each

brings. CBR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change to improve community health and eliminate health disparities. CBR brings researchers together with members of the community to: identify the issues; collect, analyze and interpret the data; and decide how to use the results to inform policy, change practice and improve conditions in the community. (Canadian Institutes of Health Research 2015)

It is not generally acknowledged that these activities may have provided for a form of inclusive, affirmative action that in some regards would be antithetical to the scientific project. Querying the role of community within HIV research is one instance where silence does not equal death, but arguably, and potentially, quite the opposite. From a position of strengthening the social science research enterprise, Canadian research on HIV has tipped towards community control, with arguably insufficient consideration of the implications for advanced scientific outcomes.

On one side, it is difficult to argue against the inclusion of community when it can increase the validity of research; improve research measures, interpretations, and knowledge translation and dissemination; and provide a platform for vulnerable and excluded communities. However, on another side, such a centrality of community can be detrimental to social science research that is intellectually less public, engaged, and community-based.

As Editor of the *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, Robert S. Remis (1946–2014) wrote:

In the field of HIV in particular, community involvement has been both useful and problematic. Community-based advocacy has been a powerful driver of policy decisions related to research, clinical management and prevention policy. Nevertheless, some of this input has not been helpful ... [It] need[s] to be interpreted in the context of scientific evidence. ... Good ideas, even if widely held, are simply not good enough. (Remis 2013, e277).

Influenced by the work of Howard Becker (2007), Mariam Motamedi Fraser (2012) suggests that it is not the social scientist alone that enjoys ‘privileged access to social analysis.’ Indeed as Vetter (2011) explains, lay participation in scientific observation has a long and storied past far beyond the modern era. Yet, how much do the democratisation of technology (Sclove 1995), the democratisation of science (Klienman 1998) and even the democratisation of social science research through community centrality (Epstein 1996, 1995, 1991) act to neglect the very scientific project they seek to enhance?

Today we are within an era of scholarship where the products of academic research and scholarship are increasingly considered a form of communal, cultural property. UNESCO (1970) defines cultural property as something that embodies an importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science. Cultural property is considered peremptorily normative when it is so fundamental that no state or being may ignore it (George 2005). Sociologically we can understand such a norm as universal and foundational, accepted and recognised as something from which deviance is unacceptable and modification is frowned upon. Norms that become so universally accepted as to become peremptorily normative can, as George (2005) suggests, act to substantiate the reason for and justify group associations of cultural objects, which can lead to beliefs about cultural property. In other words, the collective consciousness surrounding a norm can become a form of both cultural property and sociocultural capital, and in turn shore up the

foundations of the shared norm. So, have the social sciences become forms of communal cultural property?

Community research economies

In Canada, in the 1990 s and 2000 s, as economies for HIV prevention evolved, and as primary funds for HIV prevention began to recede, communities and those that acted as their gatekeepers increasingly began to make requests of social research. Social science is a type of science that often uses methods, lexicons and tools that lend themselves to some community understanding. By extension it is often simpler than other forms of science for communities to become involved with. Therefore, social scientists working in the field of HIV and AIDS could find themselves at the intersections of science and community. Moreover, while the roles for community were increasingly prescribed (advisory committee, recruiter, peer researcher), the role for science and in particular for social science theory and method within this new community research landscape were becoming more contested.

In Canada, many social scientists watched as the theoretical developments of other countries often surpassed those of domestic practitioners. In Canada, we focused on applied research and state-driven models of CBR that were imbued with expectations around the incorporation of peer researchers who were valued not for their research training but for their lived experience (Guta et al. 2014; Logie et al. 2012). At the same time, we struggled with our home institutions to involve communities to the growing extent that all parties seemed to desire. Yet, somehow, our idealistic centralising of community as a means of improving research, its outcomes, and its applications seems to have evolved to become less about scientific ends, and more about access to a variety of resources and platforms.

This was further exacerbated by reductions in funding and sponsorship mechanisms that saw cuts to many of the resources that were available to community groups and agencies in the early years of Canada's HIV epidemic. Resources targeted to health and social care research in the field of HIV, once the domain of university-based investigators or university-led research teams, began to shift in terms of who in the community at large could apply for these resources to support their work, and what the prescribed role of community within this work should be (Guta et al. 2014; Harris 2006). This has resulted in a context where social research that does not embed in it community consultative and participatory processes may not succeed at finding support from funding agencies (Pearson et al. 2015; Hall, Tremblay, and Downing 2009).

In many ways new community research economies did help the research undertaken and the application of the outcomes found. These economies enabled community's involvement in the research process and improved the community HIV sector's capacities to understand research, and to effectively interpret research findings for their constituents. Community development facilitated by these resources led to improvements in the delivery of health promotion activities to key populations. For policy and practice, the sponsorship of community research economies has been popular and justifiable because, as UNAIDS (2014) affirms, community centrality does prevent some HIV infections and has ensured better care, treatment, and support for people living with HIV. Yet at the same time, this shifting of the centre changed some researchers and their work into forms of cultural property. It acted in part to transform and separate social scientists from the products of their labour and to lead towards a form of alienation one might term the social scientist's *anomia*.

The social scientist's anomia

Community hegemony in the field of the social sciences can impact scientists through the creation of forms of anomic social conditions (Durkheim 1951, 1947). This would be recognised in contexts where disciplinary (e.g. scientific) norms of practice lose their meaning and value, and where consequently people (e.g. scientists) lose their place in the social structure (Cohen 1972; Merton 1964). This resulting anomia (MacIver 1950) is a very real cost of social science efforts that purposefully omits community for methodological, financial or substantive reasons.

Today, in Canada, for example, it is not only the social scientist confronted by an array of affected communities that appears to be driving community's position in the research structure. The anomia experienced by the social scientist working outside an applied and collaborative community model is influenced by the positioning of a community base, as well as by the prescribed behaviours of one's discipline(s), sponsors, and home institutions. A point of irony is that today, some of the same HIV researchers who promoted community forms of research, lobbied for community research funding envelopes, and judged the applications and the ethics of work proposed, can, in the contemporary Canadian context, find their work to be deemed not community-central enough.

But the social sciences cannot be about absolute community engagement alone; the social sciences are not only 'applied community development' (Allman 1998). On a purely methodological front, for the scientist working across the social sciences, it is as important for the structure of a research investigation, including the choice of research method and the choice of whether to include any form of community component, to be defined by the research question as it is by the nature, role, or qualifying element of the community in question.

Yet, in our sciences, the politics of community centrality increasingly act to presuppose any such purely methodological decisions. Even at the level of ethical review, community benefit and the roles of a community in a research process have come to shift the field, and in doing so, to alter the way decisions are made, as well as the outcomes of those decisions (Brizay et al. 2015; Guta et al. 2014; Guta, Nixon, and Wilson 2013).

The instrumentalisation of knowledge

One of the strongest rationales for community-central approaches in the social sciences has been the ways in which they enable and enrich knowledge translation. The sociologist Robert Merton was adamant about why it is important for science and its ethos to hold knowledge as a common, communal good (Merton 1973 [1942] as referenced in Calhoun 2009, 580). Merton's work foreshadowed the positions we see reflected in more contemporary work, such as that of Daw-Nay Evans (2012, 99), who argues that 'to a large degree the gross inequalities in health in our world are due to inequalities of access to the development and application of relevant knowledge.' Research knowledge and the translation of that knowledge into policy, practice, and capacity is a core – even prescribed – component of our work (see Grundy and Smith 2007). But, does the process of translating that knowledge sufficiently justify community's centrality in the research process? Further, how do social scientists strike a balance between work that aims for or results in community development, and work where the emphasis is on scientific advancement (Allman, 1998)? Is such a balance even possible?

History offers some guidance. In the nineteenth century, John Henry Newman (also known as Cardinal Newman) did not regard utilitarian knowledge as an improper

outcome of scholarly work, but he did feel that utilitarian or instrumental knowledge was not the only form of knowledge that we should pursue and disseminate (Evans 2012, 100). Newman recognised that instrumental knowledge, while lending itself to efforts characterised by freedom and equitableness, was ‘the special fruit’ of the era. However, he believed that utilitarian knowledge should override knowledge that ‘stands on its own pretensions’ or ‘which is independent of sequel’ (Newman 2008, 108). Newman anticipated the increasing role of utilitarian knowledge, yet he held fast to the importance of ensuring space alongside utilitarian knowledge for liberally individualistic approaches as well. In doing so, he anticipated tensions that exist today in terms of the value of liberal versus communitarian knowledge.

The philosophy of liberal individualism has dominated Western discourses since the Enlightenment. In it, the individual is situated as the main unit of social organisation. The individual exchanges personal, liberal freedoms in order to become a member of a society and a community. Liberal individualism forms the basis of the social contract between individuals and is responsible for our autonomy. Communitarianism, on the other hand, is seen as a cognitive conception. Communitarianism holds that the best qualities of people emerge through communal dialogue because it is through such a dialogue that people collectively understand what is meant by the ‘greater good.’ Briefly put, communitarianism opposes liberal individualism through the belief that the liberal focus on autonomy and individual rights separates the individual from community. A communitarian approach holds that individual rights are not universal, nor do they override the shared traditions and understandings about rights held by any given community.

Neo-communitarianism, associated with the development of New Labour policy, Third Way political philosophy, and modern social inclusion movements, stresses ‘the strategic importance of civil society for social cohesion and economic vitality’ (Fyfe 2005, 539). Neo-communitarianism is seen to rely on the third sector as the ‘organised vanguard’ of civil society (Fyfe 2005, 539). In doing so, it expands the social economy through a new emphasis on social value and social cohesion under the broad banner: *Think Global, Act Local*.

The collective experiences of contemporary communicable pathogens such as HIV, Hepatitis C, SARS, and Ebola have both influenced the new communitarianism and have been influenced by it. Today, the place of community within social science is driven both by its very real centrality – it is ultimately communities and the individuals within them that are infected and affected by these maladies – and by broader social shifts with regards to communitarianism. It is within this particular socio-political and historical context that community’s place within social science research structures can be understood.

Lessons from public scholarship

In 2004, when Michael Burawoy described, in his address to the American Sociological Association, his perspective on sociology’s particular investment in the defence of civil society, he ignited a discussion that still resonates today. Burawoy’s call for ‘synergy,’ ‘reciprocal interdependence,’ and ‘organic solidarity’ between professional, critical, policy-oriented, and public sociology was, at the time, counter to the conventional approach to the discipline. The conventional approach held that professional sociologists should not ‘accept the politicisation of the research process’ because to do so would ‘allow values to intrude into the research process’ in such a way as to discredit the legitimacy with which sociology had sought to be considered a science. In other words:

Put differently: in order to remain scientific, professional sociology [needed to] stand in an unalterably adversarial relationship with the value-laden radical/critical sociology that constitute[d] the basis for Burawoy's vision of a properly constituted public sociology. (Helses-Hayes 2009, 832)

The result was a disciplinary standoff; a division between professional sociologists who suggested that violating value neutrality in favour of a value-infused public sociology would make the products of those working in the discipline into little more than an exercise in journalistic editorialising. In short, critics of public sociology argued that for sociology to advance the needs of the modern world, 'more and better science, not less, [was] the way to go' (Helses-Hayes 2009, 833).

A parallel discourse that considered the role of an engaged public emerged within the discipline of anthropology (Scheper-Hughes 2009). This discourse was driven by new vantages on the colonialism embedded within the relationships between nineteenth and twentieth-century anthropologists and their communities of interest, and – like other community research movements – by the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Kirsch 2010). Lamphere (2003) has suggested that a major challenge facing contemporary anthropology is how to shift the outcomes of research beyond the university, and beyond the confines of a single discipline, and by extension, to transform the researcher as scientist into researcher as participant, advocate, or activist (Low and Merry 2010).

Debates around the translation of research knowledge, how to engage a given public in the framing of research questions, and the application of research findings have different implications for the social sciences than arguments focused on a community's centrality in the production of the evidence contributing to that knowledge base. That is to say the impact of engaged scholarship relative to the 'politics of knowledge production' (Speed 2006, 66) seems very different than the impact of engaged scholarship vis-à-vis the production of the knowledge itself. It is one thing to grapple with the 'crisis of representation' where the representation of the other is concerned (Denzin 2002, 482). It is another to transform through academic discourse alone (regardless of its public or private nature) the individual skill sets and theoretical imaginations of community members engaged in social science research.

Engagement in the translation or diffusion of findings derived from, for example, a content or regression analysis is very different from engagement in the technical, hands-on production of research analyses that form the basis of knowledge to be translated. It is not to say these skill sets and abilities cannot be learned, because clearly they can. The point is that solid training in the applied conduct of the social sciences cannot be attained or assumed through political or advocate perspectives about the value of public engagement within the sciences. This is because the methodological needs of the social sciences speak to different kinds of engagements – one being philosophical, the other technical. One, a way or ways of knowing, the other 'made in rigorous academic terms' (Hale 2006, 105). Within the social sciences, how we understand ourselves *to know*, and the knowledge derived from our *practices of knowing*, influence our research questions. They influence how these questions become operationalised and how the aims, objectives, and measures of our research are set down to document the social world.

Practices of knowing

Contemporary inclusive 'practices of knowing' can be contextualised by reflecting on the work of the Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), and in particular his thoughts on the utility of the kind of intuitive-based knowledge that people develop

through their everyday lives (Kippax 2013, personal communication; Kippax et al. 1988). Vico has been described as an ‘intellectual historical provocateur’ (Marshall 2011, 141) because he sought to reject the reason and rationality of Enlightenment-era thought and instead to approach understandings of the social world through lived insight and reflection on social processes such as myths, taboos, superstitions, folk tales and other social bonds (Davis 2014).

Although officially a Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Naples, Vico was also an early philosopher-anthropologist, intent on fleshing out real world practices of knowing that were in direct contrast with the rationalism of Descartes (1596–1650). For Vico it was ‘the opinions, beliefs, ideas, values and habits of thought ... experiential judgment [and] normal, unsystematic, rigorless “wisdom” and folk knowledge common to the generality of people, which creates and sustains certain opinions, beliefs, ideas and cultural practices’ (Davis 2014, 48). Such variability meant that it was unlikely that each individual would ‘attain the same certain knowledge of things,’ in part because not all individuals would embody similar *wisdom impulses*; hence, practices of knowing, and individuals’ investment in that knowing, could diverge substantially.

Wisdom was very important to Vico. He equated the pursuit of knowledge with the pursuit of wisdom (Perkinson 1976), but unlike the followers of Descartes, he did not believe that scientific, mathematical certitude was the only defensible knowledge to pursue (Cahnman 1976, 827). Foreshadowing Cardinal Newman’s thoughts on the value of utilitarian knowledge, and laced with components of contemporary constructivism, Vico felt that rather than a form of absolutism whereby only the certain, the known, the clear and the distinct could be considered knowledge and truth, wisdom-as-certitude could be surrounded by any number of lesser, or likely, truths. For Vico, a clear difference between certainty and uncertainty was found at the level of manufacture. The laws of physics and mathematics could be considered certain because they were manufactured (through discovery) by humankind. In a sense, these laws were infallible because once proved they were unable to be disproved, whereas other likely truths or *verisimilia* were essentially fallible owing to their improvability. Such fallibility concerning knowledge, wisdom, and truth was what being a social actor embedded in social relationships, structures, and institutions was all about.

Vico considered those who sought knowledge as fallible creators of that knowledge. Take for example, the social sciences. Scientific method, validity, reliability, and reproducibility – even when accounted for within these sciences, they could not wholly guarantee certainty as an outcome. As such, the practices of knowing within and outside these sciences should be framed as fallible given their distance from certainty. For this reason professional reflexivity occupies an important place in the scientific project, particularly in relation to the identification and mitigation of bias (Kippax and Kinder 2002).

Wholly absent from discussions of the public’s engaged role in community, participatory, and action-oriented sciences is the deeply soul-searching reflexivity with regards to fallibility and unreliability that should be at the very heart of the scientific methods practiced by the social scientist. Arnstein’s (1969) two dimensional ladder depicting the incremental rungs of citizen participation, while underscoring present debates about social science as influenced by political, advocate, activist, and experiential ways of knowing, and the discourses that have emanated from them, has rarely considered the role of reflexivity within community-central research activities. This implies that while researchers require reflexivity, such a requirement is unnecessary for the community base.

Ideally, the role and the work of the researcher are perspectival, open-minded, and tolerant. In order to frame, implement, and interpret research, those who conduct it are

required to be empathic (Coplan and Goldie 2011) and reflexive (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Empathy and reflexivity enable the researcher to metaphorically try on the shoes of those they collaborate with, or investigate, and to see the issues researched and the outcomes learned, not only scientifically but through a human lens as well (Stephenson and Kippax 1999).

Conclusion

The theories of Newman, Vico, and the liberal individualists about the ways that we can know what we know resonate strongly. As I gaze across the collection of the Museum of Failed Research, I scan a multitude of failures, yet I am most engaged with the examples of social research that have omitted community on purpose. Facets of our disciplines might argue that public, community-centred research is the way forward. Our funders may increasingly press for it through the insistence of the inclusion of community collaborators and knowledge users. Our academic and research institutions may come around to recognise its value after years of devaluing it, but they do so with insufficient consideration of the social scientist's practices of knowing, and the role of empathic reflexivity within these practices.

The sociologist Lynn Jamieson (2011) builds upon David Morgan's (1996, 2011) work on families to conceive of 'practices of intimacy.' For Jamieson (2011, 1.2) 'practices of intimacy' are defined as those 'practices which enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other.'

For contemporary social scientists, and specifically those working in HIV, our 'practices of intimacy' are driven by the illnesses of our time, our social relations relative to these illnesses, and all that our collectivities represent. These intimacies increasingly influence our practices of knowing – to the point where we afford arguably inflexible forms of centrality and certainty to community. We do so not just because such centrality is the physical manifestation of what is a 'greater good.' We do so also because we function alongside a neo-communitarian agenda where to not centralise or to omit the certainty of community physically and metaphorically means the possibility of failure within the social sciences.

The likely truths of a community-central, public, engaged, participatory, action-oriented research may indeed lend themselves to practices of knowing that are particularly well-suited to contemporary health disparities. But are these practices as empathetic and as reflexive, and are they any less likely to fail, than the practices of a research that omits a community-based, public, engaged, participatory, and action-oriented lens?

In conclusion, if the omission of community in any given social or behavioural research results from an effort to achieve better science – because one or a combination of research questions, research methods, and/or research ethics warrant community-exclusion over inclusion – then a neo-communitarian ideal should not, owing to an interpretation of a common good, automatically override a liberal individualistic path, if that path is lined with empathic reflexivity. Moving forward will require work not only to better understand when and why community should be centred to avoid failure, but when and why it is important to omit community centrality to achieve the same goal.

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